



BILL RICHARDSON
GOVERNOR

State of New Mexico
ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT

Office of the Secretary
Harold Runnels Building
1190 St. Francis Drive, P.O. Box 26110
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502-6110

Telephone (505) 827-2855

Fax (505) 827-2836

www.nmenv.state.nm.us



RON CURRY
SECRETARY

DERRITH WATCHMAN-MOORE
DEPUTY SECRETARY

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Contact: Jon Goldstein, NMED Communications Director
Phone: (505) 827-0314

Environment Department Continues Successful Partnership to Protect and Restore Valle Vidal Area Watershed

(Santa Fe, NM) – The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) has recently extended a partnership with the Boy Scouts of America, Philmont Scout Ranch to protect and restore the Ponil drainage, a major tributary of the Cimarron River in the Valle Vidal area of Northern New Mexico. This partnership was created to help rehabilitate areas burned in the Ponil Complex fire of 2002. At 92,124 acres burned, the Ponil Complex fire was one of the largest wildfires in New Mexico history.

Through this partnership, NMED's Surface Water Quality Bureau Watershed Protection Section has overseen a total of \$270,635 in grants to the Boy Scouts. This funding relationship was due to expire in March but has been extended by NMED through December 31, 2005.

"This project is making a huge impact on protecting and restoring one of New Mexico's most cherished natural areas," said NMED Secretary Ron Curry. "Every summer more than 20,000 Boy Scouts from around the country enjoy this beautiful region. Through this project, these scouts are also learning about the environment and helping to protect water quality."

Since 2002 Boy Scouts have hand raked, mulched and seeded thousands of acres burned by the fire. This labor-intensive task has been primarily focused on ridge tops and sloped areas. These efforts have helped prevent erosion and protect the health of local creeks and rivers.

In addition, NMED's Surface Water Quality Bureau Watershed Protection Section has overseen a total of \$648,843 since 2003 in state and federal grants to the Cimarron Watershed Alliance to more broadly address water quality issues throughout the Cimarron watershed. The alliance is a made up of local ranchers, landowners, elected officials business owners, civic groups and private citizens.

Another area waterbody, McCrystal Creek, was recently named the second most endangered river in the U.S. by American Rivers, a national river conservation organization. In making this

listing the group noted plans for coal bed methane drilling as the main threat to this creek's health.

“Governor Richardson has taken a strong stand against drilling in the Valle Vidal. It would be a shame if oil and gas drilling destroyed the progress we have made in restoring these areas,” said Secretary Curry. “We have the tools to help restore an area after a natural event like a fire. The kind of impacts caused to a pristine area like the Valle Vidal by drilling are far tougher to turn back.”

For further information, please contact Jon Goldstein, NMED Communication Director at (505) 827-0314.

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